

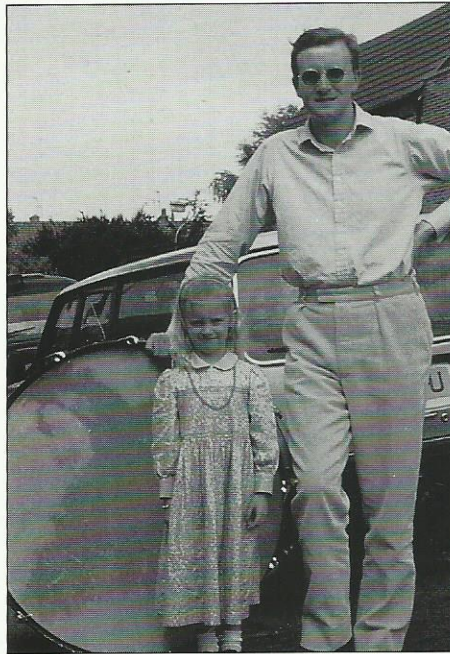
Do Give Up The Day Job

By *Liveryman Stephen Plumb.*

It is an undoubted fact, that of the one hundred City of London Livery Companies presently in existence, our own, the Musicians' Company, is one of the few which has in the majority, a membership consisting of 'hands-on' practitioners of their craft. One has only to take a cursory glance at the list of Livery Companies to see names of trades and professions which have long been consigned to the annals of history. Whether such Companies have become purely refuges or indeed 'dining-clubs' for prosperous lawyers and accountants etc. I am in no position to judge. However, what I am certain of is, that the very nature and make-up of our Company has given it a particular identity in the City which causes members of other Liveries to describe us as 'friendly' and by some, 'unique'. We, the Musicians Company, can boast that the esteemed lawyers, accountants and even actuaries among our ranks, can all claim either active amateur (if not professional) involvement in the art and science of music and/or musical instrument making; or at the very least, those in our number, who make their living in the field of commerce often do so within the context of the music industry itself.

I'm sure that for every Liveryman and Freeman of our Company who was asked to explain how they came to be part of our ancient band, one would hear a different story. My own tale is somewhat convoluted and according to some, vaguely interesting! I have, therefore been encouraged to tell all if only to assist in the small hours, insomniac readers of 'Preserve Harmony'.

From the age of twelve, I took lessons in Drums and Percussion from the late George Scott of Wanstead. George's own style of teaching was solid and would probably be described as being of the 'old school'. It is a fact that of all the sections of an orchestra or band, the percussion has the greatest attraction to 'little Johnny'. Well, little Stephen was not immune to the magnetism of the cymbals and the timpani. I was one of a motley crowd of boys to beat the path to 'Mr Scott's' door, to sign up for lessons. The trick with George was that he had a method of sorting the wheat from the chaff by means of the percussive equivalent of scales and arpeggios; namely, Rolls of each and every description, Drags, Flams,



Liveryman Stephen Plumb with daughter Katherine (5) and Bass Drum (45)!!

Paradiddles etc. etc. all of which obviously were to be executed at a mind-numbingly slow tempo before progress was detected and advancement attained.

George's methods were guaranteed to sift out those who were only attracted to drumming because of Ringo Starr's haircut. Those that had the determination to continue were privileged to receive teaching and wisdom which came out of his wealth of experience which included playing on ocean-going liners in the thirties, having a 'good war' as a musician with the Royal Air Force and being part of the Archer Street scene in London in the forties and fifties. The all-round and somewhat old-fashioned technique, which I learned under George, was to stand me in good stead later in life, and at times has given me the edge over some less advantaged peers.

However, all was not to prove fruitful. For various reasons, as a teenager, I neither concentrated on my music nor my academic studies, effectively 'flunking' school at the age of sixteen. In a last ditched fit of enthusiasm, I auditioned as a percussionist with one of Her Majesty's more prestigious units, but was politely declined over a cup of tea at Chelsea Barracks. At this point, the father of a musician friend of mine from school heard of my lack of direction and told me that a syndicate of the Lloyd's Underwriters where he worked, were looking for a 'bright young man' to train as an

Underwriter's Clerk: was I interested?

I indicated that I was and in May 1975, walked through the hallowed portals of Lloyd's of London as I was to continue to do, with God's grace for the next twenty years!

Thankfully though, my musical involvement rather than declining to become purely a memory of my youth, actually increased year on year. Sometimes, to such an extent that my employment at Lloyd's was often an inconvenience to my far more fulfilling, musical activities. From the age of sixteen onwards, I was being passed work as a percussionist with either local semi-professional orchestras or I was being fixed as a drummer with Jazz combos and cabaret bands. This involvement continued to a greater or lesser degree, running as a parallel source of income to my existing insurance activities. All along, I had a feeling that as much as I enjoyed City life, I wasn't going to spend the rest of my working career behind a desk.

Incidentally, it was through one of my colleagues at Lloyd's that I was nominated as a Freeman of the City, only to be introduced to the Company some years later by another colleague who is a Musician-member of Common Council. At about the time that I was admitted to the Company in April 1994, I was carefully considering leaving the wonderful world of insurance for good. This I finally did in March of 1995.

Needless to say, the transition hasn't always been easy, but the pros far outweigh the cons. The main noticeable difference has been that I am solely responsible for procuring my work and therefore my income. My work is currently coming from two areas. Firstly through a jazz quartet which I run and promote mainly within the field of corporate entertainment, and secondly, as a freelance musician in my own right. This second category of work can be as varied as playing latin percussion with a sixteen piece big-band, to playing in a pit orchestra for a touring show. The changes of work patterns mean that I am often at home with my wife and daughter during the daytime, which is a tremendous bonus. Most importantly, to play with excellent musicians, in whatever context and to be paid for it, is one of the finest situations in which one could possibly find oneself!